

Rebuilding Lives through Rebuilding Homes: Shelter Support to Conflict Affected Families in Northern Sri Lanka

Kannagiammah and Joseph of Alankulam, Kanagarayankulam South, Vavuniya district



Moving into their newly constructed permanent house has been a dream come true for Kannagiammah and her husband Joseph. Contributing their own labour, the couple successfully reconstructed their war damaged house in under 12 months. This achievement is particularly noteworthy as Joseph, who was the chief builder, has been disabled for the past two years, having lost part of his left leg during the conflict in the North of Sri Lanka.

The family was supported in their re-construction efforts by the project “Shelter Support to Conflict Affected IDPs in the North of Sri Lanka” – a partnership between UN-HABITAT and the Australian Government. Following a “Home Owner Driven” process of construction, the project has supported 3,785 families in the districts of Vavuniya, Mullaitivu and Killinochchi to rebuild and repair their war damaged homes over 18 months. As the implementing agency, UN-HABITAT provided vital technical input to the home owners including assistance with house designs and type plans, guidance on the use of building materials and assistance in solving land tenure issues.

Born in 1984 in Mankulam in the Mullaitivu district, Kannagiammah married Joseph in 2001 when she was just 17 years old. As Joseph owned a plot of land in his village, the couple started their new life in Alankulam in Vavuniya North. Although Joseph was trained in masonry, his main livelihood at that time was farming in keeping with the traditional livelihood of his family. In 2002, Kannagiammah and Joseph had their daughter Venuka, followed by the birth of their son Venushan in 2004.

The village of Alankulam in Vavuniya North was affected by the conflict between the LTTE and the Sri Lanka Armed Forces, which made normal civilian life difficult for communities for over three decades. The family was directly affected by the conflict in 2008 when they were displaced from their village due to fierce fighting. In the same year, Kannagiammah gave birth to their second son – Thuvakaran.

In early 2009, with the escalation of the conflict in the Northern Province, Kannagiammah and her family were compelled to relocate to Mullivaikal in the Mullaitivu district with thousands of other internally displaced families. In April 2009, during the final stages of the conflict, tragedy struck when their eldest son Venushan was killed during a fierce battle between the LTTE and Sri Lanka Armed Forces. Joseph and Kannagiammah were also injured with Joseph’s injuries requiring the amputation of his left leg below the knee.

Project Quick Facts

Project: Shelter Support to Conflict Affected IDPs in the North of Sri Lanka

Duration: 2010-2011

Location: Vavuniya, Mullaitivu and Killinochchi districts

Funded by: Australian Government (AusAID)

Implemented by: Communities, UN-HABITAT

No of Houses repaired/reconstructed: 3,785

In May 2010, having spent nearly one year in a welfare camp for internally displaced persons following the end of the conflict, the family returned to Alankulam and commenced rebuilding their disrupted lives.

As a vulnerable family with a disabled family member, Kannagiyammah's family was selected for support to fully reconstruct their damaged house under the Housing Recovery Project. According to the Government stipulations, the housing grant applicable at that time was Rs.325,000 (approx. US\$ 2,900)¹ provided in four installments. The project followed a home owner driven process (HOD) where beneficiary families take the prime responsibility to rebuild their own homes. This method ensures that the home owners have the freedom and flexibility to rebuild their homes according to their own needs and aspirations. This method also significantly reduces the amount of funds spent on construction as the family are able to provide substantial input on labour, additional funds and construction supervision.

Home Owner Driven Approach

The home owner-driven approach for reconstruction of houses includes a contribution from the beneficiary family. This ensures active engagement of households members and will provide full opportunity for consultation with the beneficiaries regarding the construction/repair and house design

Joseph's skills in masonry and carpentry work has given the family a clear advantage in rebuilding their home. Joseph was the chief builder with Kannagiyammah undertaking minor masonry work to help her husband during the housing construction. He undertook the construction work using crutches for mobility – which he preferred to the prosthetic leg. The family is pleased that they did not need to pay a professional builder to undertake construction work until their house reached roof level.



Since their resettlement, Joseph has faced difficulties in restarting his earlier livelihood of farming due to their agricultural land becoming unusable during the war. He currently earns a living undertaking work as a mason and carpenter. However, as travelling long distances is difficult due to his disability, Joseph is limited to construction work near Alankulam. Having received a disability grant from the District Secretariat, the family is using the money to construct a well in order to start vegetable cultivation.

In mid November 2011, Kannagiyammah gave birth to her fourth child. The family was happy to welcome the newest family member to their brand new permanent house where the baby is sheltered and protected from the elements. The timely assistance in supporting families to reconstruct their permanent homes by the Housing Recovery Project has provided

vulnerable IDP families with a home of their own.

The photographs depict: 1. Kannagiyammah in her garden; 2. Completed house 3. Joseph and Kannagiyammah with their daughter

For more information on the project, please contact:

Shelter Support to Conflict Affected IDPs in the North of Sri Lanka Project

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¹ The amount in US\$ is based on the exchange rate during project implementation: 1 US\$ = 112 SLRS.